

LETTERS

Not Faceless

I have read with interest R. Jan Stout's article on homosexuality (Summer 1987), and I have tried to admire him for addressing what liberal Mormons call an "agonizing" issue. He is closer to the truth about homosexuality than most Mormons (the competition isn't fierce), and I suppose it is nice that *DIALOGUE* awarded him a prize for bringing its readers information that has long been common fare outside of Mormondom. But somehow the whole enterprise smacks of self-congratulation — something to make liberal Mormons feel less guilty about publicly supporting a church that treats gay people so monstrously while privately wringing their hands and admiring Dr. Stout for "doing something."

He has, in fact, done something, but considerably less than he might. His article rests on two unacceptable assumptions. First, he discusses homosexuality as if it were a theological discussion topic, a clinical phenomenon needing further study, an abstraction with no face. Sure, he mentions an anonymous patient here and there and regrets that some gay Mormons commit suicide. And I suppose he may be genuinely saddened by the havoc the Church wreaks on the lives of homosexual Mormons. But he leaves us thinking that Church treatment of gay people is a problem for him and his straight, liberal friends to ponder, discuss, and shake their heads about. Second, although he laments the abuses of his profession regarding gay people, he does not question or even offer to share the health establishment's authority. It is as a psychiatrist that he quotes other psychiatrists to challenge the

assumptions of previous generations of psychiatrists; although he freely admits that gay people had been telling him for years that they discovered rather than chose/learned their sexuality, he, like most of his colleagues, arrogantly disregarded such claims until people with credentials like his own said the same thing. In short, he has written an article about homosexuality as if Church persecution of gays were merely a conceptual problem, and he has done so showing no intention of relinquishing any authority endowed in him by the profession that from its beginning has so tragically misrepresented gay people.

These two assumptions are unacceptable for several reasons. Gay people are not an abstraction. We are real people with a distinguished history living authentic lives. We love, we work, we play, and we contribute enormously to the good of society. But many of us suffer, particularly those gay Mormons who will despise themselves until their homophobic Church accepts them. My friend Steve was such a gay Mormon. Entrapped by BYU security, he "voluntarily" underwent aversion therapy at BYU and was later pressed into marriage by a zealous stake president who convinced him that prayer, laying on of hands, and "commitment" had cured him. It hadn't, and a few years later Steve was sexually active with other men, estranged from his wife and children, and overwhelmed by guilt — the product of a good Mormon upbringing that had carefully taught him to hate himself. Despairing, Steve turned to the Church for help and was eventually excommunicated by a "court of love." Two weeks later he took his life.

Steve's is not an isolated case. While Stout and his profession debate whether

gay people are reliable witnesses of their own experience, and the readers of *DIALOGUE* fret about the "homosexual problem," thousands of gay Mormons must endure an unremitting assault on their integrity and self-esteem from a church that preaches love but practices hate. This hate makes it impossible for my family to accept both me and the Church; it tells me the love I have for my lover is born of sin; it would isolate me from my rich friendships with other gay people; it would excommunicate me for claiming more from life than furtiveness, loneliness, and frustration. And it is this hate that would place Church authority between me and God. Maybe Stout, his colleagues, their liberal friends, and perhaps even a few apostles might get it right some day, but how many more Steves will there be in the meantime?

Some of us can't wait, nor should we. Liberation for gay Mormons, in the short run at least, begins by repudiating the power structures that oppress us and the authority of those who persecute us, regardless of their medical and ecclesiastical credentials. They have power over us only because we give it to them. From our experience of God, ourselves, and each other, we know that homosexuality is our nature and that in it and maybe even because of it, we can love God and enjoy fruitful, love-laden lives.

Now I don't want to sound ungrateful. I cherish the friendship and love of my non-gay friends and rejoice in their blessings as they rejoice in mine. Moreover, I am deeply moved by those who support us without condescension in our quest for justice, acceptance, and understanding. It is reassuring that many straight people in the health professions and the clergy now recognize what we have always known.

Maybe I have been too hard on Dr. Stout. Maybe his article wasn't written for us, but for the bigots and homophobes in his profession and church who, like Stout seventeen years ago, are incapable of listening to what we say about ourselves.

And maybe he just forgot to forswear, even a little, the power to judge, define, and condemn gay people that is implicit in his article. If so, my apologies. If not, may God help him and all who would do us evil lest they be judged as they have judged us — with arrogance, misinformation, and hate. In the meantime, may God grant his children the grace to love them as they have not loved us.

Adam Shayne
New Haven, Connecticut

Reaction to Reductionists

I congratulate R. Jan Stout for his efforts to reevaluate his former position on homosexuality (Summer 1987), but I wonder if he has gone too far in accepting the currently popular arguments of biological reductionists. There can be little doubt that structure limits function, but to argue that structure always determines function ignores too much knowledge about human socialization.

Stout's proposition that there are biologically based differences in sexual propensity seems irrefutable, but to say that sexual *behavior* is predominantly a biological phenomenon does not necessarily follow.

His suggestion that sexual practices in New Guinea cannot be explained in terms of social norms and socialization is flawed. He concludes that the failure of men in New Guinea to continue childhood homosexual behavior beyond the age at which it is encouraged and allowed shows that homosexuality is not a product of negative and positive reinforcement but is biologically predetermined. That is why, he infers, men who are not innately homosexual cannot remain homosexual in adulthood.

I come to another conclusion. A given culture can have different expectations for different age groups, and individuals can be socialized to adjust to such expectations. A case in point is thumb sucking in our culture. A child who determinedly resists efforts to make him or her cease thumb

sucking often changes positions dramatically when with a peer group that scorns such behavior, and even may ridicule thumb suckers. The ability of New Guineans to change sexual behavior when they are in peer groups which reject it refutes the belief that such behavior is entirely biological.

Stout argues that "apparently environment fine tunes the instrument of sexuality but neither creates nor organizes its direction" (p. 34). Then he mentions a Kinsey study of a large sample of San Francisco gays which shows that the "average male subject had more than five hundred male partners in his lifetime. Among the white males in the study, 28 percent reported more than a thousand" (p. 40). Are we to believe that such behavior is due to uncontrollable biological nature? Stout himself speculates contradictorily that the AIDS scare has produced some changes. Could a scare change biology?

He does acknowledge that "environmental factors can profoundly shape the style, expression, and quality of sexual behavior in all of us, whether straight or gay" (p. 34). This comes pretty close to saying that it "organizes its direction" if it does not also help to "create" it.

Stout continues, "I have never met or treated a homosexual who felt that he or she had a choice in the matter" (p. 35). Obviously, he has never studied prisoners who have become homosexual by associating with homosexual inmates, often, it is true, by coercion, but often also by choice. I have met such inmates, and I have read accounts of homosexuals who chose to become homosexuals because of the opportunities their circumstances afforded them.

Stout says he is still searching, and he admits, "I do not know the answers" (p. 40). Nevertheless, he seems to argue for biological reductionism (which may be true to a large extent in a few rare cases), but the evidence tells me that for the vast majority it is not so cut and dried. We all must continue to look for answers and, hopefully, avoid being swayed by popular

theory. Not knowing all the answers, we would be wise to avoid conversion to contemporary "scientific" thought embracing biological reductionism in view of so much evidence supporting the power of socialization.

Wilford E. Smith
Provo, Utah

The Stout-England Debate

Both Jan Stout and Gene England were my good friends when we all attended Stanford University back in the sixties. I have been reading their writings on homosexuality with interest. In an earlier day I would have responded in the voice of Rustin Kaufman; but the current editors have an aversion to pseudonyms. However, there's nothing wrong with letting you know what Rustin would say:

"Years ago when visiting Salt Lake City I used to swim at the Deseret Gym, next to Hotel Utah. All the swimmers were male, and all of them swam nude, from young boys on up to old men. Now if Dr. Stout is right about one male in ten being born gay, just think how many of those swimmers were perverts, eyeing the rest of us.

"I've been thinking how sad it is that so many of the gay men in the Church will wind up as ministering angels in the hereafter, rather than as polygamous galaxy populators. I don't quite know why the Church abandoned polygamy for *this* life; but I sure look forward to having my own flock of righteous handmaidens in the next. Already I've approached several spinster temple workers, widows not previously married in the temple, divorcees with good Church attendance records, and a few physically or mentally impaired younger women not likely to marry in this life. I've told each one that she is welcome to seal herself to me, once I'm dead. In case this alarms you, I hasten to explain that in every single case, I've pointed the woman out to my wife, before approaching her,

giving Bathsheba every chance to veto my selections.

"I admire Brother England for standing up for the right in the matter of homosexuals. These gays — especially the ones whose inclinations are irreversible — have got to understand that this isn't the church for them. I used to think it wasn't the church for blacks either. But I was wrong about that.

"I think a lot of good can come from the Stout-England debate. Brother Stout has made it clear that most male gays are congenitally and irreversibly that way. And Brother England has served notice on them that they won't be coddled or encouraged with regard to their weird inclinations. I predict that as a result, most of the Church's gay men will move on to San Francisco, leaving the rest of us free to resume our swimming in the nude."

Joseph H. Jeppson
Woodside, California

Twenty Times Twenty

I joined the LDS Church some eleven years ago. During that time, our Gospel Doctrine class has gone through the scriptures several times in the four-year rotation. I have no problem with repeat study of a subject; but time and time again, I have seen the efforts of a good Sunday School instructor, who wanted to expand on a subject, have his/her efforts thwarted by the class itself. After a few years Sunday School became a real drag for me! Fortunately about this time DIALOGUE entered my life. What a joy! Your journal gave me the spiritual sustenance I craved and missed in my regular Sunday School class.

Since very early childhood my life has been filled with "ghostly" experiences, some good, some not so good. Consequently, while most young boys my age dreamed of becoming baseball stars, my thoughts were occupied with analyzing my ghostly experiences. Nor did it take me long to discover that one did not discuss such topics

with one's peers. I went from church to church — several Eastern religions and a number of Christian denominations — in an effort to find some answers. The problem was always the same: the more I studied the philosophies, gospel, or mechanics of each of these religions, the more limitations and discrepancies I found. Did no one have any answers?

Then, about twelve years ago, someone did me the great favor of loaning me *Life Everlasting* by Duane S. Crowther (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, Inc., 1967). A quotation from Joseph Smith at the very front of the book especially attracted me:

"All men know that they must die. And it is important that we should understand . . . our departure hence . . . it is but reasonable to suppose that God would reveal something in reference to the matter, and it is a subject we ought to study more than any other. We ought to study it day and night, for the world is ignorant in reference to their true condition and relation. If we have any claim on our Heavenly Father for anything, it is for knowledge on this important subject" (*History of the Church*, 6:50). This book certainly played a part in softening my resistance to the Mormon missionaries who appeared frequently at my door. Finally, I had found a religion that encouraged unrestricted study!

I have, on occasion, introduced DIALOGUE to certain friends who I thought might be ready for some expanded spiritual interchange. Almost always the journal has been rejected with the excuse that it has an anti-Mormon bias and tends to weaken the spirit rather than strengthen it. I have been saddened by the realization that too much truth will frighten rather than enlighten a person.

The Bible and Book of Mormon both record instances where prophets are told not to record certain experiences (Rev. 10:4; 2 Ne. 27:8, 21; Job 4:8). Because God wanted to keep secrets from us? I doubt it! The glory of God is intelligence.

God wants us to be like him. The scriptures, our church — and *DIALOGUE* — encourage us to become more like Father.

Congratulations on your twentieth anniversary. May you be blessed with twenty times twenty more!

Albert E. Schindler
Cardston, Alberta

Still Relevant

I was introduced to *DIALOGUE* about 1971 by a subscribing uncle who loaned me some back issues to read. His loan couldn't have been better timed, for one of those numbers was the first women's issue (Summer 1971).

As both an active Mormon who had previously served a mission, and a feminist (before there was such a term) with a brand-new Master's degree, I was wrestling with the conflict of marriage-versus-career, trying to reconcile what the Church said was the only "right" choice for every LDS woman (be a wife and mother) with the professional opportunities for which my personal interests, talents, and education had prepared me. The women's issue was truly cathartic; suddenly there were all those points of view, reassuring me that my dilemma was far from unique. So, comforted by *DIALOGUE* that there was more than one acceptable option for a well-intentioned LDS woman — and having job offers, but no marriage proposals at the time — I went into teaching and shelved my moral crisis for the next fifteen years.

Two years ago (this time having a marriage proposal but no job), I changed course dramatically, marrying in the temple and settling down to middle-aged housewifing in a small Utah town where there is little else for a married woman to do.

But the Church-versus-world tug-of-war goes on, intensified by President Benson's address to mothers (Feb. 1987). There are the same old issues: Why should

(or shouldn't) married women work outside the home? How many children should they have? Does motherhood really enjoy equal status with priesthood? etc.

We need *DIALOGUE* to produce another composite women's issue. Only this one (unlike the 1981 version) should be updated and renamed (the gender issue?) so as to embrace such current situations as single parenthood, alternate methods of acquiring children (or exercising birth control), surviving a divorce, men as parents, homosexuality, sex education, and coping with (or avoiding) modern venereal diseases.

Articles on any of these topics appearing in previous issues could also be reprinted, as well as some selected from the other women's issues.

Let's face it: all of these items, however unpleasant or unresolved, affect Mormons as well as society at large. Today's *DIALOGUE* readers and writers still need to be reassured that they are "not alone" in either their feelings or experiences.

Michele M. Tinchler
Parowan, Utah

Light from Headquarters

While reading Warner Woodworth's allegations of "bureaucratic inefficiencies" (p. 33) in the Church Office Building (Fall 1987), I could swear I heard the ghost of Senator Joseph McCarthy intone, "I have here in my hand a list of 205 who are known to be incompetents within the Church Office Building."

In contrast, I present this view written in 1856 by Elder Robert Skelton as he served as a missionary in Calcutta, India. "[Church] headquarters," he wrote, is the source "from which emanates life and light to the soul of every faithful Saint" (*Millennial Star*, 16 Aug. 1856, p. 523).

Lee Copeland
Church Office Building
Salt Lake City, Utah

Peace in Service

Thank you for an enjoyable introduction to DIALOGUE via the twentieth anniversary issues. Probably I should have been reading DIALOGUE for the last two decades.

In 1967, at age sixteen, I became a "born-again Latter-day Saint" after putting into practice several verses in the Book of Mormon related to spiritual birth (Mosiah 3:19; 4:10-15; 5:2; 27:24-28; Alma 22:15-16 and Alma 24). For me the Sermon on the Mount became the most important guide of Christian living. As a result of my convictions I became a conscientious objector to military service and later served two years of alternate service as a hospital central supply worker.

When I originally declared my conscientious objector status, many Church members disagreed with me, so my belief almost became my own sacred secret. I have yet to hear of any other Latter-day Saints who became conscientious objectors and participated in alternate service, although I would like to.

Several years after my alternate service, genealogical research led me to my remote

and previously unknown Quaker heritage. A recent series of personal revelations has opened up a "mission to Friends," and I am extracting their old records for temple work. Perhaps even peace and friendliness can be inherited.

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Lowell Bennion Biography

For my biography of Lowell L. Bennion, I am seeking letters, diary entries, memorabilia, class notes, and any other documents relating to his life. I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has been influenced by him in any way, whether as students, colleagues, friends, readers, writers, or neighbors. Please write or call.

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**THE JOHN WHITMER HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
CALL FOR PAPERS**

The John Whitmer Historical Association will hold its annual meeting in Nauvoo, Illinois, 23-25 September 1988. The association is particularly interested in presentations dealing with the 1830-47 period of Church history that is common to both the RLDS and LDS churches. Send proposals to Paul Edwards, vice-president and program chair, Box 1059, Independence, Missouri 64051. For membership, which includes the annual journal, please send \$10 to: Kay and Alma Blair, Secretaries, 419 S. State Street, Lamoni, Iowa 50140.